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ABSTRACT

This brief guide for kindergarten teachers shows how teachers and teacher aides can work as a team. Guidelines for selecting new aides and getting acquainted with an experienced aide are provided. A teacher's responsibilities to the teacher aide are listed. An aide's responsibilities, including instruction, management, housekeeping, and clerical, are specified. Teamwork is emphasized. In-service and on-the-job training are discussed. Categories of job-related information which ought to be supplied to aides are listed. What to do about problems of communication and human relations is briefly discussed. (Author/RH)

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AN AIDE IS NOT A MAID

And some other things teachers should know about working with kindergarten aides.

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Teacher aides are relatively new phenomena on the national education scene. South Carolina's kindergarten program has been fortunate to include them since its inception a decade ago in 1969.

Everyone involved in educating young children profits from the work of aides. The children themselves are rightfully the major beneficiaries of a more individualized, broader, richer learning experience which the aide makes possible. Teachers and children benefit when teachers have more time to devote to instructional tasks because there is an aide to share the other duties. Teachers have the added bonus of an adult companion who understands and supports her goals for the children. The parents and the community benefit by having a fellow citizen who can keep them informed about the goals and daily operation of the school. Aides themselves are rewarded by an interesting new career in which they not only help **teach**, but also **learn** more about children, learning processes, and human relationships.

In the kindergarten the teacher and aide should function as a team. Both members must work together for greatest effectiveness. As a member of this team, the teacher does not relinquish her professional responsibilities for planning, evaluating, and supervising children's learning. But she does share these activities with another unique adult personality, another brain, another heart, another pair of hands, feet, eyes, and ears. The aide becomes an integral part of the teaching team.

With the benefits of an aide come two added responsibilities for the teacher: to help the aide acquire the knowledge and skills she needs, and to make the team relationship work well for the overall benefit of the children.

Like people in all careers, aides come equipped with varied backgrounds, abilities, talents, personalities, experiences, and attitudes. It is important that the teacher consider these unique characteristics as she plans with her aide for the best ways to meet the needs of the children in their care.

AN AIDE IS NOT. . .

. . .A maid, whose sole duties are cleaning up children, floors and equipment; getting out materials and putting them away; mixing paints; "watching the children"; and other menial tasks which do not use her talents and time effectively. **Housekeeping is a team job.**

. . .A bandaid to be stuck on trouble spots haphazardly. **The teacher and aide should plan and evaluate together.**

. . .A scapegoat who is continually expected to deal with children whose behavior the teacher cannot handle, and perform the work which the teacher cannot or will not do. **Both teacher and aide should work as partners with all the children.**

. . .A panacea who will magically dispel all problems from the kindergarten. But a teacher and aide working in tandem will certainly prevent some problems and reduce others.

. . .A threat to the teacher, because sometimes she knows some children better, responds spontaneously and sensitively to their needs, and uses imagination and creativity in the classroom and in outdoor activities. **The more she knows and does, the more help she will be.**

INSTEAD, AN AIDE IS. . .

. . ."A person who acts as an assistant," according to Webster.

. . .A real benefit to children's emotional and intellectual development by giving them individual attention, answering their questions, correcting their mistakes, stimulating their efforts, and helping them solve their problems.

. . .A supportive adult who broadens the children's range of adult relationships.

. . .A valuable asset to the teacher, someone who provides the companionship and support of another adult, whose personality complements the teacher's, and who has a real share in instructional as well as clerical, managerial, and housekeeping tasks.

. . .A vital link between the kindergarten, the home, and the community.

SOUND IDEALISTIC?

Not if you're willing to:

1. recognize that your aide brings her own unique talents, experiences, and empathy with children to your kindergarten;

2. devote some time and energy to sharing your philosophy, general practices, and pet peeves with her;

3. train your aide in the procedures and techniques of instruction and discipline which you have found most effective for young children (getting the benefits of an aide means helping her learn what she needs to know to perform her job well);

4. listen to your aide's suggestions and answer her questions openly and patiently;

5. work with her as a team, sharing both the enjoyable aspects of kindergarten and its mundane, routine chores.

This extra effort to establish and maintain rapport and a good working relationship with your aide pays rich rewards, both to you and to the children.

SELECTING NEW AIDES

Elementary principals are beginning to involve kindergarten teachers in the selection of their aides. Although hiring is primarily the principal's responsibility, teachers should take advantage of their opportunity to attend interviews with applicants. While some districts have specific minimum requirements for education, age, and other qualifications, most principals rely on word-of-mouth recommendations and choose someone from the community, often an interested parent.

Whoever is responsible for hiring should verify the prospective aides' application forms, question their previous employers, and require medical examinations to be sure that applicants are free from communicable disease. The interviewer should also determine the applicants' suitability for working with children.

When the kindergarten teacher is invited to help interview prospective aides, she should be alert to these promising characteristics:

- warm, friendly personality
- good health and stamina
- enthusiasm
- experience and empathy with children
- language and clarity of expression
- pleasant voice
- grooming and appearance
- special talents (art, music, dance, carpentry, gardening, science, etc.)
- cooperative spirit

Once the aide has been selected, it is then the teacher's responsibility to establish a good working relationship and to train the aide to perform the specific functions which she has been assigned.

GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH AN EXPERIENCED AIDE

When the kindergarten teacher is the newcomer, the experienced aide can be of great assistance in helping her to get acquainted with the children, their parents, and community resources. Any problems which may arise are usually common to any new situation. They are generally resolved

with time, experience, and open communication.

If your aide says, "Last year we used to" or "But we've always done it this way," try to accept these comments as helpful suggestions. We all build on past experience. If such comments bother you, talk it over together. Make it clear that the aide's suggestions are welcome, but that each teacher has her own way of doing things. . .and that yours may differ from your predecessor's. If the aide does not understand your reasons for doing things differently, explain why and answer her questions as honestly as possible. Be patient and do not become defensive. It usually takes a while for two people to become comfortable with each other.

If your aide tends to function independently, without asking you for direction, you may feel that she would like to "be the teacher." New teachers need to realize that an experienced aide feels secure in continuing her past patterns. Do not take such indications of initiative as a personal affront. Explain nicely but firmly how you prefer things to be done. Once your aide understands your methods, you will probably find that her initiative becomes an asset.

If parents look to the aide as their sole source of information, do not jump to the conclusion that the aide is threatening your position. An aide who is a member of the community will probably know the children and their families better than a new teacher. It is logical that parents turn to the more familiar person first. Take advantage of your aide's familiarity with the community by asking her what you need to know. Encourage her to introduce the parents to you. As parents get to know you better, they will come to you for advice and assistance on professional matters which are your responsibility. Make sure that the aide understands what general information she may discuss with parents and other citizens—and what individual or confidential matters should be referred to the teacher.

WHAT ARE A TEACHER'S RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE AIDE?

• To explain her philosophy of kindergarten and her goals for the children.

• To explain the reasons "why" certain things are done specific ways, such as:

- why we don't use workbooks.
- why kindergartens have areas for sand and water.
- why learning centers are used.
- why we always start on the left.

• To outline the aide's broad areas of responsibility.

• To delineate the aide's specific duties and any limitations of her responsibilities.

• To include the aide in daily planning so that she knows the schedule and what her specific duties will be. Your aide will appreiciate a written plan outlining daily activities. In case you are absent unexpectedly, this will serve as a helpful guide both for her and the substitute.

• To assist her in establishing her role as a member of the team.

• To help her acquire skills necessary to function more competently in her role, such as how to:

- talk to children.
- observe children's behavior and describe it accurately.
- read a story to a group of children.
  respond to children's art work.
- use expansion and extension techniques to enhance language development.
  record children's dictation.
- write manuscript letters correctly.

- operate audiovisual equipment.
- care for kindergarten plants and pets.
- mix paint.

- To help her relate instructional materials to learning experiences (such as what children learn through using art and manipulative materials, water, blocks, puzzles, etc.).

- To help her acquire a basic knowledge of child growth and behavior, including

  - learning what is appropriate behavior for four-, five-, and six-year-olds.

  - learning that all children have unique experiences and characteristics which affect their development and consequently our expectations for them.

  - learning how children change and develop socially, physically, mentally, and emotionally in the kindergarten environment.

- To help the aide understand her responsibility in interpreting the kindergarten program to the community.

- To work with the aide to establish and maintain an attractive, harmonious learning environment in the kindergarten.

- To help her deal with disciplinary problems by helping her to evaluate children's behavior and initiate changes when necessary. When a child is in imminent danger of huring himself or another person, immediate action by the nearest adult is vital. To maintain consistency, the teacher must instruct the aide how certain disciplinary problems should be handled. The teacher must also explain when the aide should intervene in children's disputes and when to let them work out their own solutions. Aides also need to know exactly what behavior is acceptable, to what extent they should discipline children, and what discipline problems should be referred to the teacher.

WHAT ARE THE AIDE'S RESPONSIBILITIES?

While responsibilities of aides will differ from class to class, they generally fall into four categories: instructional, managerial, housekeeping, and clerical. The lists below offer some suggestions but should not be considered inclusive or inflexible.

Instructional

- Planning learning activities with the teacher.
- Observing and evaluating children's progress and problems with the teacher.
- Helping to evaluate whether activities have achieved their desired outcomes.
- Working with children in various learning centers.
- Talking with children about what they are doing while they are playing.
- Listening to children tell stories or talk about themselves and their interests.
- Helping children learn to use classroom materials (scissors, paste, puzzles).

- Showing pupils how to operate equipment (tape recorder, language master, etc.).
- Helping individual children understand the teacher's directions.
- Participating with the class during group time.
- Working with individual children.
- Carrying out planned activities with a few students.
- Taking charge of a small group working on a special project.
- Reading or telling stories to children.
- Helping children choose library books.
- Helping an individual pupil look up information in a book.
- Acting out stories with children.
- Singing with a group of children or playing instrumental accompaniment.
- Taking responsibility for the class when the teacher is absent from the room.

Managerial

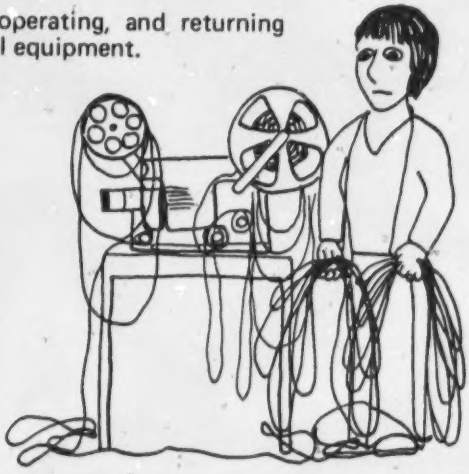
- Redirecting a restless or inattentive child into available activities.
- Helping pupils move from one activity to another in the classroom.
- Taking individual children or small groups to and from

various places in the school.

- Aiding children in sharing, participating, and choosing constructive activities.
- Assisting in helping children learn acceptable behavior.
- Helping pupils with their clothing and grooming.
- Helping children use the bathroom correctly.
- Supervising children's arrival and departure by bus or car.

Housekeeping

- Checking room ventilation, lighting, temperature.
- Preparing learning centers and work areas.
- Gathering and preparing materials.
- Preparing classroom for the next activity.
- Helping pupils clean up and put things away.
- Helping children care for plants and animals.
- Assisting in preparing snacks.
- Assisting teacher in getting kindergarten ready for the next day.
- Making arrangements for the use of equipment and materials.
- Setting up, operating, and returning audiovisual equipment.



Clerical

- Assisting in maintaining health and attendance records.
- Assisting in collecting money for snacks, pictures, etc.
- Duplicating newsletters to parents.

Other Considerations

Plan and evaluate together. A written plan sets out in advance what you hope to accomplish and enables the aide to carry out scheduled activities in the event that you are absent.

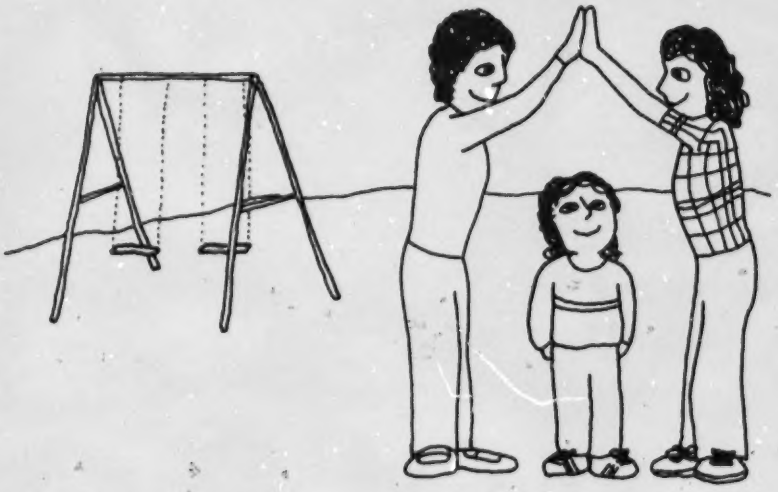
When assigning duties and responsibilities, the teacher should consider the special training, talents, and interests of the aide. If the aide shows interest in an activity, but insufficient skill, the teacher should demonstrate the skill and give her a chance to practice it. **If you do not know which activities your aide enjoys most—ask her!**

Utilize the aide's time wisely. Remember that both teacher and aide should spend the majority of their time with the children. If you need letters cut out for the bulletin board, have the aide do it before or after school hours or between

half-day sessions—some time when the children are not present.

Aides should not have to consistently supervise children outdoors alone. This is vital teaching time, too. **Teacher and aide together should supervise children outside.**

Most aides appreciate opportunities to work with **all** the children rather merely those whose readiness or achievement level is below average, or whose behavior is disruptive. Varied assignments make work more interesting.



While there are many functions for which the classroom teacher is legally responsible, these are often performed at some level by the aide. Both training and on-the-job experience prepare the aide for increased responsibilities. As she develops her ability to guide children's learning, her competence is easily recognized—and measured—by what she is able to do. As she gains knowledge and experience, tasks assigned should be broadened and expanded.

A new or inexperienced aide may require a great deal of guidance and direction. On the other hand, an experienced aide will probably work competently with only occasional "clues," verbal or non-verbal, from the teacher.

RELATING TO CHILDREN

Since both teacher and aide form the adult team in the classroom, children usually distinguish no difference between them. Some children may relate better to the aide than to the teacher. Wise teachers accept and encourage these relationships and help their aides make this rapport meaningful to the children. Teachers should never consider these relationships as a personal deficiency or threat, since all humans get along better with some people than with others.

WHEN SHOULD TRAINING TAKE PLACE?

In-Service Training

Some districts hold preservice and in-service training days for both teachers and aides. Both should take advantage of these

opportunities to discuss philosophy, goals, and other aspects of the kindergarten program with training personnel and other teachers and aides.

In districts where there is no scheduled training for aides, teachers and aides should request preservice and in-service programs through their principal or district supervisor. If there is no district early childhood education coordinator, consultants from the State Department of Education or from other districts might be brought in.

An alternative is having experienced teachers coordinate regular orientation and in-service training themselves, with assistance from experienced aides. Another option is visiting other kindergartens in operation, where aides can observe sound practices and promising innovations. This has the added benefit of increasing the aides' feelings of making a worthwhile contribution when they bring back helpful new ideas to their own school.

On-the-Job Training

Like most teachers, aides get their most effective training on-the-job. Unlike teachers, most aides do not have a broad education or theoretical background in early childhood education. In many school districts, the only training aides receive is directly from the teachers with whom they work.

During regular scheduled planning time—or before or after school—the teacher and the aide can discuss goals for learning centers and special needs of specific children. This is usually the best time to evaluate the effectiveness of past learning sessions. The teacher and aide can review a morning activity and suggest ways to improve results. Full participation in planning and evaluation bolsters aides' self-confidence, as well as increasing their skills and knowledge.

The aide learns by observing the teacher's daily interaction with the children. The teacher may need to demonstrate specific techniques or procedures for some activities, then encourage the aide to practice them before "going it alone." Learning-by-doing and emulating the teacher's model are the most effective learning methods for the aide as well as for children.

WHAT AIDES NEED TO KNOW

- Personnel policies and practices governing their positions (working hours, salary, sick leave, other benefits such as insurance)
- Job responsibilities and limitations
- Pertinent administrative policies and procedures
- School plant layout
- Objectives and goals of the kindergarten
- Developmental expectations for the 3- to 6-year-old age group
- Specific tasks and skills involved in their assignments
- Kindergarten equipment and materials and any regulations governing their use (duplicating equipment, audiovisual aids, playground equipment, etc.)
- How to plan and evaluate activities, arrange the kindergarten for different activities, use the library, use outdoor equipment and centers, and use other resources for children
- How to observe children's behavior and report it accurately
- First aid and safety
- How to communicate effectively with the children and the adults with whom they work

COMMUNICATIONS

Open, tactful communication is the key to interpersonal relationships. Most aides are anxious to learn more about child development and to form good relationships with teachers and other staff members, parents, and pupils.

There are some districts where training in human relations and communications is offered to all staff members. Certainly this is one topic for in-service workshops which benefits everyone. If your district does not have such workshops, promote starting them. A well-qualified guidance counselor, psychologist, or other individual trained in this field can conduct these sessions for all staff. There are also many books, films, and audiovisual materials on the subject.

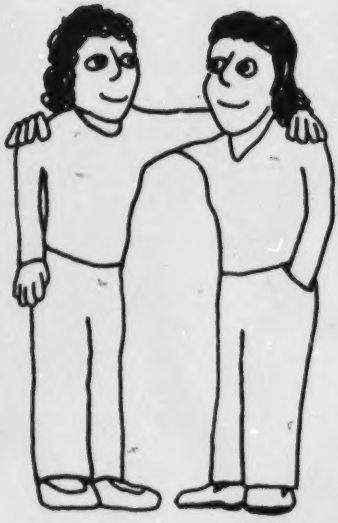
When personal conflicts arise, discuss them as soon as possible with the aide, rather than allowing them to fester. Broach your concerns and encourage the aide to voice hers—in a mutually respectful, helpful manner. Most aides appreciate tactful suggestions about how they can improve their work.

While this may be difficult at first, it is the teacher's responsibility to initiate positive dialogue. Better rapport and working relationships often result if the teacher and aide get to know each other better on a personal level, perhaps by sharing some after-school activities of mutual interest away from the school environment.

When you feel you cannot deal with the problem alone, consult your school guidance counselor or principal about the matter—or go to the district early childhood coordinator for help. Such outside discussions must be both professional and confidential.

When the aide does not fulfill all her duties, first make sure that she understands her responsibilities and has been properly trained to perform them. Patience is essential in learning some new techniques, or changing old habits. If the situation does not improve in a reasonable time, consult the principal for advice and assistance. The principal may refer you to someone else for consultation, such as a teacher who has been successful as a team member. Let this consultant work objectively with your team to discuss concerns, analyze problems, help develop alternatives, demonstrate more appropriate techniques for teamwork, or test different approaches. We all benefit from a fresh, new viewpoint. If the aide really cannot do the job, your principal will expect proof that you have tried conscientiously to remedy the situation before requesting a replacement.

Most problems or concerns are not unique to your kindergarten, but common to the majority of teacher-aide teams. All of us are striving to acquire skills which will enable us to communicate and operate more effectively.



Successful teacher-aide teams do not just happen. Both members must be willing to make a special effort to help the team function effectively. When it does, everyone benefits—especially the children. And that's what it's all about.

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Suggested Further Reading

The Aide in Early Childhood Education (1973)
Vivian Edmiston Todd.
The Macmillan Co.
866 Third Avenue
New York, New York 10022

Helping the Teacher Utilize Aides (1975)
Jack O. L. Saunders, Donald Ferguson,
Robert E. Wright, James L. Olivero
Adapt Press, Inc.
808 West Avenue, N.
Sioux Falls, South Dakota

The Other Teacher: Aides to Learning (1973)
Eric Gattman, William Henricks
Wadsworth Publishing Co.
Belmont, California 94002

Aides to Teachers and Children (1968)
Sylvia Sunderlin, ed. ACEI. Bulletin 24-A
3615 Wisconsin Avenue, NW.
Washington, D. C. 20016